12

Regime Security

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Chapter Contents

Reader's Guide

This chapter examines the unique security dilemma facing developing countries. It begins with an explanation of the security threats facing states with weak institutional and coercive capacity and lack of national cohesion—what are called weak states—before going on to look at the kinds of security strategies that weak-state elites typically adopt to try and manage their predicament. Referred to as an 'insecurity dilemma', and in contrast to the security dilemma facing strong, developed states, the problem faced by weak states is a security environment in which the primary threats to security originate from internal rather than external sources. The chapter goes on to examine a number of competing theoretical explanations for how the weak state predicament arose and why it persists. It concludes with a brief discussion of international attempts to build security in weak states, and the long-term prospects of transforming weak states into strong states.

Introduction

By any measure of security, the disparity between the wealthy, developed countries of the global **North** and the rest of the world could not be greater. Citizens of the small group of highly developed nations face no real threat of major war and enjoy abundant food supplies, economic prosperity, comparatively low levels of crime, and enduring political and social stability. Even the threat of terrorism is extremely minor compared to the everyday risks of accident or disease.

By contrast, the majority of people living in developing countries face profound security challenges, including perennial threats of **intra-state war** and communal violence, poverty and famine, weapons proliferation and crime, political instability, social breakdown, economic failure, and, at its most extreme, complete **state collapse**. At the most basic level of physical security, between twenty million and thirty million people have lost their lives in more than 100 intra-state wars in developing regions since 1945. Around 90 per cent of the victims were civilians, and tens of millions of people were displaced by the fighting, many of whom have remained refugees for decades after. There are between twenty and forty intra-state wars ongoing in any given year, all of them in developing countries. In a great many more developing nations serious internal political violence, such as military coups or rebellions, ethnic or religious violence, campaigns of terrorism or riots and disorder, is a constant threat.

In addition, half a million people are killed every year by light weapons, frequently during criminal violence and almost all in developing countries. Added to these military threats, an estimated 40,000 people die every day from hunger and tens of millions of others die annually from diseases such as influenza, HIV/AIDS, diarrhoea, and tuberculosis. Tens of millions more suffer from chronic poverty, lack of employment opportunities, inadequate health, and environmental ruin. There is, in other words, a profound disjuncture between the kinds of security enjoyed by the small group of developed nations and the kind of security environment inhabited by the majority of the world's population. From a global perspective, insecurity is actually more the norm than security.

This situation provides us with important reasons for trying to understand the nature and consequences of insecurity in the developing world. Empirically, we need to understand why so many wars and bouts of major political violence since 1945 continue to take place in the developing world, and why most of them originate from internal rather than external sources. Conceptually, there is an urgent need to find appropriate theories and concepts that can accommodate the unique character of the security situation in these countries, not least to facilitate more appropriate and more effective international security policies. From a normative perspective, there are clear humanitarian imperatives to try and deal with the immense suffering caused by the lack of basic security in the world's 'zones of instability'. Finally, enlightened self-interest dictates that we make a real effort to resolve the fundamental inequality in security between the developed and developing worlds. Globalization means that insecurity in any part of the world cannot be contained within increasingly porous national borders; security is, to a large extent, interdependent. In many ways, terrorism, gun crime, illegal migration, the drugs trade, and environmental damage are all spillover effects of persistent insecurity in the developing world.

In this chapter we shall try to make sense of the profound security challenges facing developing countries and the unique security dilemma they find themselves trapped in. We shall examine the nature of the main security threats facing developing nations, the key security strategies that they have adopted to deal with these threats, and the domestic and international causes of their security predicament. The argument we wish to advance in this chapter is that, unlike the developed nations of the global North, the primary security threats facing **weak states** are potentially catastrophic and originate primarily, although not exclusively, from internal, domestic sources. They include, among others, the threat of violent transfers of **power**, insurgency, secession, rebellion, genocide, warlordism, and, ultimately, state collapse and anarchy.

Moreover, these internal threats are rooted in the fundamental conditions of statehood and governance, thereby creating an enduring 'insecurity dilemma' (Job 1992) for ruling elites: the more elites try to establish effective state **rule**, the more they provoke challenges to their authority from powerful groups in society. In this context, **regime security**—the condition where governing elites are secure from violent challenges to their rule—becomes indistinguishable from **state security**—the condition where the institutions, processes, and structures of the state are able to continue functioning effectively, regardless of the make-up of the ruling elite. For weak states, the domestic sphere is

actually far more dangerous and threatening than the international sphere.

Given this inversion of the accepted conception of the classical security dilemma (in which military threats originate primarily from other unitary states in an anarchic international system), it is not surprising that the weak state **insecurity dilemma** has received little attention in the orthodox security studies literature. By focusing on a limited number of states (the great powers and developed countries), a limited set of military threats (Soviet expansionism, foreign invasion, nuclear proliferation, rogue states, international terrorism), a limited array of security strategies (national defence, deterrence, arms control, alliances), and employing a restricted conception of security (externally directed 'national security'), the security challenges facing the majority of the world's population have been largely sidelined in academic studies. Widening and deepening our understanding of security therefore necessitates a new set of diagnostic tools that allow us to get to grips more fully with the security challenges facing the vast majority of the world's people and the unique kind of states they inhabit.

KEY POINTS

- There is a profound disjuncture between the security challenges facing developed and developing countries.

- There are important empirical, conceptual, normative, and self-interested reasons to attend to the security of developing regions.

- Weak states face a unique set of security challenges that originate primarily from internal sources.

- Orthodox approaches to national security are severely limited in what they can tell us about the conditions of security in weak states.

The weak-state insecurity dilemma

The unique insecurity dilemma facing weak states is largely a function of the structural conditions of their existence. Weak states lack the most fundamental of state attributes—namely, effective institutions, a monopoly on the instruments of violence, and consensus on the idea of the state. Consequently, as incomplete or 'quasi-states' (Jackson 1990), they face numerous challenges to their authority from powerful domestic actors and manipulative external actors. In order to understand how this condition of insecurity arises in the first place, we need to examine the primary structural characteristics of weak states and the nature of the internal security threats they face.

Weak states

Assessing state strength can be a difficult and controversial exercise; scholars tend to apply different measures. Thomas (1987) associates state strength/weakness with institutional capacity and distinguishes between two forms of state power: despotic power and infrastructural power. Despotic power refers to the state's coercive abilities and the exercise of force to impose its rule on civilians. By contrast, infrastructural power refers to the effectiveness and legitimacy of the state's institutions and its ability to rule through consensus. States may be 'weak' or deficient in one or both of these capacities, but, as a general rule, strong states have less need to exercise coercive power because their infrastructural power makes it unnecessary. Paradoxically, the more a weak state exercises coercive power, the more it reinforces its 'weakness' and corresponding lack of infrastructural power.

In contrast, Buzan (1991a) argues that states consist of three primary components: a physical base, institutional capacity, and the 'idea of the state'. For Buzan, state strength/weakness rests primarily in the less tangible realm of the 'idea of the state' and the extent to which society forms a consensus on, and identifies with, the state. Weak states, therefore, 'either do not have, or have failed to create, a domestic political and social consensus of sufficient strength to eliminate the large-scale use of force as a major and continuing element in the domestic political life of the nation' (Buzan 1983: 67).

Migdal (1988) provides a counterpoint to both these formulations. He defines state strength in terms of state capacity, or 'the ability of state leaders to use the agencies of the state to get people in the state to do what they want them to do' (Migdal 1988: xvii). But then he reverses attention to how society and groups within it tolerate, permit, or resist the development of the state. He argues that most developing societies end up in a state/society standoff where the state confronts powerful social forces with substantial coercive force, which in turn provokes violent resistance—as occurred in Libya and Syria during the uprisings in 2011. In Migdal's view, weak states are less the issue

than strong societies. This internal **balance of power** between state and society militates against the emergence of prototypical Western-style nation states.

In summary, three dimensions of state strength appear to be important: (1) infrastructural capacity in terms of the ability of state institutions to perform essential tasks and enact policy; (2) coercive capacity in terms of the state's ability and willingness to employ force against challenges to its authority; and (3) national identity and social cohesion in terms of the degree to which the population identifies with the nation state and accepts its legitimate role in their lives.

Empirically, it can be seen that most developing nations are weak or deficient on most if not all of these dimensions. Or, they have overdeveloped coercive capacities but lack infrastructural capacity and social consensus. As a consequence of these fundamental deficiencies, weak states typically display all or many of the following characteristics: institutional weakness and an inability to enact national policy or perform basic state functions such as tax collection and providing law and order; political instability, as evidenced by coups, plots, rebellions, protests and frequent violent changes of government; the centralization of political power in a single individual or small elite who command the machinery of government to run the state in their own interest; unconsolidated or non-existent democracies; ongoing economic crisis and structural weakness; external vulnerability to international actors and forces; intense societal divisions along class, religious, regional, urban–rural, and/or ethnic lines; lack of a cohesive or strong sense of national identity; and an ongoing crisis of legitimacy for both the government of the day and the institutions of state in general, often expressed in widespread protests, boycotts, strikes, and disorder.

The most important characteristic of weak states is their frequent inability to establish and maintain a monopoly on the instruments of violence. Even in states with well-developed coercive power, civilian governments do not always retain the absolute loyalty of the armed forces and face a constant threat of military intervention. For most weak states, however, the armed forces are ill equipped, poorly managed, and prone to factional divisions. At the same time, a range of social actors—rival politicians with their own private armies, warlords, criminal gangs, locally organized militias, armed and organized ethnic or religious groups, and private security companies or mercenaries—are powerful enough to resist the state's attempt to enforce compliance. In such a situation, even the most minimal

requirement of statehood—the monopoly on the instruments of violence—is largely out of reach.

At the other end of the scale, and in complete contrast, it is suggested that *strong states* have the willingness and ability to 'maintain social control, ensure societal compliance with official laws, act decisively, make effective policies, preserve stability and cohesion, encourage societal participation in state institutions, provide basic services, manage and control the national economy, and retain legitimacy' (Dauvergne 1998: 2). Strong states also possess high levels of socio-political cohesion that is directly correlated with consolidated participatory democracies, strong national identities, and productive and highly developed economies—although these are not immune to crisis and social protest. Most importantly, strong states exist as a 'hegemonic idea', accepted and naturalized in the minds of ordinary citizens such that they 'consider the state as natural as the landscape around them; they cannot imagine their lives without it' (Migdal 1998: 12).

Crucially, the notion of weak and strong states is not a binary measure but rather a continuum along which states in the real world fall. Moreover, it is a dynamic condition. States can move back and forth along the continuum over time given sufficient changes to key factors: weak states can become strong by building a strong sense of national identity, for example; and strong states could potentially weaken through increased social conflict brought on by immigration or austerity measures, for example. Most states in developing regions fall towards the weak end of the state-strength continuum.

KEY POINTS

- The key dimensions of state strength/weakness are infrastructural capacity, coercive capacity, and national identity and social cohesion.

- Weak states are typically characterized by institutional weakness, political instability, centralization of power, unconsolidated democracy, economic crisis, external vulnerability, social divisions, lack of national identity, and an ongoing crisis of legitimacy.

- The most important characteristic of weak states is their lack of a monopoly on the instruments of violence.

- State strength or weakness is a dynamic continuum along which states can move; it is possible for weak states to become strong states and vice versa.

Threats to weak states

Because of their debilitating structural characteristics, weak states face a number of internal and external security challenges. *Internally*, weak states face the continual threat of violent intervention in politics by the armed forces. Such interventions can take the form of *coup d'état*, mutiny, rebellion, or revolt over pay and conditions. There have been literally hundreds of coup attempts in Latin America, Asia-Pacific, and the Middle East, and nearly two-thirds of Africa's states have experienced military rule since independence. Military rulers still govern numerous developing countries.

Weak states also face serious threats from strongmen, individuals, or groups who exercise a degree of coercive and/or infrastructural power in their own right and who challenge the authority of the state. They may be semi-legitimate actors such as politicians or traditional and religious leaders who nonetheless command large followings and private access to weaponry. Alternatively, they may be criminal gangs or warlords—charismatic individuals who command private armies and enforce a kind of absolutist rule in areas under their control, primarily for the purposes of pursuing illegal commerce. Examples of such strongmen include the drug cartels in Colombia, Myanmar, and Afghanistan, and some of the rebel leaders in Africa during the 1990s, such as Charles Taylor, Foday Sankoh, and Jonas Savimbi. If the state fails to accommodate or placate such groups, they may launch a violent challenge to the regime.

In other cases, weak states face challenges from various social groups such as protestors, ethnic groups, religious movements, ideological factions, or local militias who organize for self-defence. Owing in large part to pre-existing divisions, the inability of the state to provide adequate welfare, and the tendency to employ excessive coercion, a great many ethnic groups in weak states have organized politically and militarily to protect their interests. Gurr's *Minorities at Risk* project (2000) found more than ninety ethnic minorities were either actively engaged in violent conflict with the state or at medium-to-serious risk of significant political violence. Similarly, in a number of Middle Eastern and Asian countries, such as Algeria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, and Thailand, religious groups have launched violent challenges to the state. Ideologically driven groups also continue to threaten weak states, from the Maoist insurgency in Nepal to the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico.

It is a sad fact that virtually all armed groups in weak states—state armies, warlord factions, and local, ethnic, and religious militias—employ large numbers of child soldiers (for more on child soldiers see Chapter 26). Into this mix, the so-called Arab Spring which began in early 2011 has seen broad-based democracy movements challenging, sometimes violently, established rulers in countries across the Middle East and elsewhere.

A final internal threat can come from the steady erosion of state institutions and processes. Increasing lawlessness and the eventual collapse of governmental institutions can create a power vacuum in which the ruling elite simply becomes one of several factions struggling to fill the void and claim the formal mantle of statehood. At various times during the conflicts in Liberia and Somalia, for example, several different factions claimed to be the legitimate government at the same time, despite lacking the necessary control of territory or governing institutions required for formal recognition. In the final analysis, any of these threats— military intervention in politics, warlords and strongmen, ethnic demands for secession, protest movements, or state collapse—may lead to sustained bouts of all-out intra-state war.

Because of their internal fragility, weak states also face a variety of *external* threats. Lacking the infrastructural or coercive capacity to resist outside interference, weak states are vulnerable to penetration and intervention by other states and groups. Powerful states may directly invade or may sponsor a coup or rebellion in order to overthrow a regime, such as the American invasions of Grenada, Panama, Afghanistan, and Iraq, NATO's support for the Libyan rebels in 2011, and French intervention in numerous African states over several decades. Alternatively, the provision of significant quantities of arms and military assistance to rebel movements, such as American support to UNITA in Angola and Soviet support for the Vietcong in Vietnam, can pose a serious threat to the ruling elite. Often, support for rebel factions or coup plotters can come from sources closer to home, such as rival neighbouring states. A great many regional rivals—such as India–Pakistan, Uganda–Sudan, Somalia–Ethiopia, Iran–Iraq—have threatened each other in this manner. In addition, very small weak states can be threatened by the tiniest of external groups: mercenary coups and invasions have been launched against the Seychelles, the Maldives, the Comoros, and Guinea-Bissau, sometimes by no more than a few dozen men. In most cases, the coups were thwarted only through assistance from powerful allies such as France or India.

A related external threat comes from the spillover or contagion of conflict and disorder from neighbouring regions. Lacking the necessary infrastructural capacity to control their borders effectively, weak states can often do little to prevent the massive influx of refugees, fleeing rebels, arms smuggling, or actual fighting. Major external shocks like this can seriously threaten the stability of the weak state. The Rwandan genocide in 1994 spilled over into Zaïre, a weak and failing state; the shock eventually led to the overthrow of the Mobutu regime, invasion by several neighbouring states and large-scale factional fighting (see Case Study 12.1).

Related to this, weak states are threatened by the uncontrollable spread of small arms and light weapons. In the hands of warlords, criminals, and private militias, these weapons pose a real challenge to the authority of the state and can intensify existing conflicts and seriously undermine peace efforts. Light, portable, durable, and easy-to-use (even by children) small and light weapons are easily obtained through legal and illegal channels, and, once in use, have a tendency to spread throughout the region. An estimated $5 billion worth of light weapons are traded illegally every year to the world's conflict zones, killing an estimated half a million people per year in criminal activity and civil violence.

KEY POINTS

- Internally, weak states are threatened by military factions, rival 'strongmen' such as warlords or criminals, rebellions from minorities, institutional collapse, protest and disorder and ultimately, intra-state war.

- Externally, weak states are threatened by interference from powerful international actors, contagion and spillover from neighbouring states and the small arms trade.

The weak-state 'insecurity dilemma'

The combination of state weakness and internal threats creates a security challenge unique to weak states. It is distinctive because it arises from meeting *internal* threats to the regime in power, rather than *external* threats to the existence of the nation state. The inability of the state to provide peace and order creates a contentious environment where each component of society—including the ruling elite or regime—competes to preserve and protect its own well-being. This creates a domestic situation

similar to the neorealist conception of structural anarchy where groups create insecurity in the rest of the system when they try to improve their own security. To distinguish this internally oriented condition from the classical *security dilemma*, it is helpful to think of it as an **insecurity dilemma**. This condition of insecurity is self-perpetuating because every effort by the regime to secure its own security through force provokes greater resistance and further undermines the institutional basis of the state and the security of the society as a whole.

In a sense, the weak-state insecurity dilemma is caused by an initial and profound lack of 'stateness', in particular, the inability to establish a monopoly on the instruments of violence. This failure can be both normative—in the sense that the state has failed to convince the population that armed resistance is wrong or counterproductive—and practical—in that the state cannot physically disarm and control all its rivals. Either way, *the lack of a political and institutional centre with a monopoly of force creates an insecurity spiral*—a semi-permanent situation of 'emergent anarchy'—where armed groups are forced to engage in self-help strategies.

Thus, within the weak-state context, where ruling elites use the machinery of government primarily to secure the continuation of their rule, the concept of *national security*—the security of a whole socio-political entity, a nation state with its own way of life and independent self-government—is wholly inapplicable. In practice, the idea of **state security**—the integrity and functioning of the institutions and idea of the state—and **regime security**—the security of the ruling elite from violent challenge—become indistinguishable. Because of the fusion of state and government, when a particular regime is overthrown, as the Syad Barre regime was overthrown in Somalia in 1991, the entire apparatus of the state collapses too. In this sense, weak-state security *is* regime security.

KEY POINTS

- The weak-state insecurity dilemma is primarily an internal condition based on the contradiction between societal and state power.

- It is engendered by a lack of 'stateness', most importantly, the failure to establish a monopoly on the instruments of violence.

- The weak-state insecurity dilemma transforms national or state security into regime security.

Security strategies in weak states

The structural characteristics of weak states and the unique insecurity dilemma in which they are trapped severely constrain the range of policy options open to ruling elites. Essentially, the conditions of governance create a semi-permanent condition of 'crisis politics' or 'the politics of survival' (Migdal 1988) in which short-term strategies of regime security substitute for long-term state-building policies.

Elite security strategies

Weak state elites typically employ a mix of internal and external strategies aimed at regime survival. *Internally*, elites employ a mix of carrot-and-stick approaches to challengers. First, lacking both infrastructural capacity and wider social legitimacy, weak-state elites are often forced to rely on coercive power and state intimidation to secure continued rule. This entails creating or expanding the security forces, spending large sums of the national income on military supplies, and using violence and intimidation against real and perceived opponents of the regime. This is perhaps the most common survival strategy of weak-state elites, and it is reflected in the appalling human rights record seen in a great many developing countries. Typically, regimes try to suppress opposition or protest through the widespread use of torture and imprisonment, assassination and extra-judicial killings, disappearances, the violent suppression of political expression, forced removals, destruction of food supplies, and, in extreme cases, genocide, mass rape, and ethnic cleansing—as seen in Libya, Syria, Bahrain, and elsewhere during the Arab Spring.

A key dilemma for elites is that the instruments of coercion—the armed forces—can themselves develop into a threat against the regime. For this reason, elites sometimes deliberately weaken the armed forces by creating divisions, establishing elite units such as presidential guards, and fomenting rivalry between different services. Such divide-and-rule strategies are also used against other potential sources of opposition, such as state bureaucracies, religious groups, traditional authorities, and opposition politicians. From this perspective, the deliberate undermining or hollowing-out of state institutions can be a rational and effective means of preventing the rise of potential centres of opposition to the regime.

On the other side of the ledger, elites sometimes find it easier to try and create positive inducements for supporting the regime. Typically, this entails the establishment of elaborate patronage systems, whereby state elites and various social groups are joined in complex networks of mutual exchange. In this way, corruption acts as a form of redistribution and a means of integrating the state in an informal power structure. Such systems may extend to strongmen in a form of elite accommodation (Reno 1998). Warlords or political leaders with private armies may be permitted control over a particular area, have state resources diverted their way, or be given exclusive control over a particular commercial activity, for example, in exchange for an agreement not to try and overthrow the regime or encroach on its other activities. In the settlement ending the war in Sierra Leone, the warlord leader of the rebel Revolutionary United Front (RUF), Foday Sankoh, became Minister for Mines in an attempt to buy his loyalty. Ethnic manipulation or 'the politics of identity' is another typical strategy in weak states. In what is a form of divide and rule borrowed from colonialism, elites will sometimes deliberately foment inter-communal conflict as a means of preventing the emergence of united opposition to the regime. At other times, it is simply a method of rooting a regime's power base in what is seen to be a reliable source of support. Thus, elites will favour certain groups in the allocation of state resources, oppress minorities viewed as hostile, create minority scapegoat groups during times of unrest, and appoint members of the elite's own ethnic group to positions of power. Such strategies are frequently successful, as ethnic consciousness is usually well developed and readily exploitable in many developing societies.

A final internal strategy involves the careful manipulation of democratic political processes. Because of their external vulnerability, a great many weak states have been forced by international donors—developed states and international financial institutions (IFIs) such as the IMF and World Bank—to begin the process of democratic reform. Alternatively, pressures stemming from widespread protest and demands for democratic reform—such as the movements we have seen in the Arab Spring—can also force regimes to make concessions. A great many weak-state rulers have successfully managed the transition to multi-party democracy and retained control of the state, primarily through careful manipulation of internal opponents and external perceptions. Typically, this involved monopolizing and controlling the media, the co-option

'Private military companies—or PMCs, as the new world order's mercenaries have come to be known—allow governments to pursue policies in tough corners of the world with the distance and comfort of plausible deniability. The ICIJ investigation uncovered the existence of at least 90 private military companies that have operated in 110 countries worldwide. These corporate armies, often providing services normally carried out by a national military force, offer specialized skills in high-tech warfare, including communications and signals intelligence and aerial surveillance, as well as pilots, logistical support, battlefield planning, and training. They have been hired both by governments and multinational corporations to further their policies or protect their interests.

Some African governments are little more than criminal syndicates—warlords such as Charles Taylor, the president of Liberia, or more sophisticated elites, such as the rulers of Angola. But to sell diamonds and timber and oil onto the world market requires foreign partners.

The people doing the extracting, the bribing, the arms dealing, and the deal-making are South African, Belgian, American, Israeli, French, Ukrainian, Lebanese, Canadian, British, Russian, Malaysian, and Syrian. They are a class of entrepreneur that operates beyond borders, often unaccountable to shareholders and unfettered by the regulation they would encounter in their own countries. They have become influential political players in the countries in which they operate.'

van Niekerk (2002)

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of opponents, setting up fake parties to split the vote, gerrymandering, ballot rigging, candidate and elector disqualification, and manipulating the electoral rules. Constructing the outward appearance of democracy without any substantial concessions can actually function to bolster regime security by giving it a degree of international legitimacy. The partial transition in Egypt following the ousting of President Mubarak in 2011 is arguably an example of this process.

In addition to these internal strategies, weak-state elites also look to form alliances with powerful *external* actors as a means of bolstering regime security. An increasingly prevalent strategy has been to employ foreign mercenaries or private military or security companies as force multipliers. There are nearly a hundred private military companies (PMCs) operating in 110 states around the world (see Key Quotes 12.1). Often working closely with oil and mineral companies, the industry is thought to be worth as much as $100 billion per year. Weak states employ private security contractors, because they see them as being more effective and reliable than many national militaries. With superior weapons and training, these private armies have often proved to be decisive in securing weak-state survival against various internal threats, although this tactic failed in Libya's civil war in 2011. In Angola and Sierra Leone, the notorious PMC Executive Outcomes turned the tide against rebel forces, recapturing diamond mining areas in the process.

More formally, weak states seek out alliances with powerful states that can help to guarantee regime survival. During the Cold War, many weak states obtained military support from one or other of the superpowers in exchange for political and strategic assistance in the East–West confrontation. In Africa, at least twenty countries entered into defence agreements with France; subsequent military intervention by French troops was decisive in keeping several West African regimes in power, including Zaïre/DRC (see Case Study 12.1), Togo and Ivory Coast. At present, the war on terror is providing weak states with another opportunity to bolster their internal security: in exchange for cooperation in fighting terrorism, the United States provides countries like Pakistan, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, and Uzbekistan (see Case Study 12.2) with vital military and economic assistance. External intervention of this kind can be crucial for keeping internal rivals at bay and ensuring regime security.

Finally, weak-state elites sometimes join together with other weak states in regional defence arrangements designed primarily to prop each other up. For example, under new multilateral security agreements, both the **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)** and the **Southern African Development Community (SADC)** have since 1990 intervened a number of times in member states to overturn coups or secure governments from overthrow by rebel forces. In March 2011, Saudi Arabia sent troops to Bahrain to protect the regime from an uprising. Thus, the creation of regional security architecture, including regional peacekeeping forces, can function as a strategy of mutually reinforcing regime security.

Security outcomes

The perennial conundrum facing weak-state elites lies in the contradiction between ensuring the short-term security of the regime and the long-term goal of state making. Many of the security strategies described are, in the long-run, self-defeating, as they further undermine the foundations of the state, provoke even more serious opposition from social groups, and delay genuine state consolidation. For most weak-state elites, however, there is no way out of this dilemma; if they neglect regime security in favour of more genuine state-building activities such as strengthening state institutions and forging a sense of national identity, they are just as likely to be overthrown in a coup or toppled by a rebellion. Thus, with few genuine alternatives, elites have to persist with policies that could eventually lead to complete state disintegration and collapse.

Ultimately, of course, a key outcome of these strategies is that the weak state, or rather the regime, becomes the greatest single threat to the security of its own people. In weak states, individual

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KEY POINTS

- Internal security strategies include repression and military expansion, employing mercenaries and private military companies, using divide-and-rule strategies, deliberately undermining state institutions, patronage politics and elite accommodation, identity politics, and democratic manipulation.

- External security strategies include employing private military companies and mercenaries, entering into external defence agreements with Great Powers, and joining in regional defence organizations.

CASE STUDY 12.1 Anatomy of a weak state: the Democratic Republic of Congo

The central African state of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has always been a weak state. It has suffered from tremendous insecurity since its founding, and ruling elites have employed all the classic regime security strategies to avoid being toppled.

At independence in 1960, Congo was poorly prepared for full statehood, with irrational national boundaries, underdeveloped state institutions, poor infrastructure, a fragile economic base, and only 100 university graduates to fill the civil service. In the first four years of independence, the country was plunged into civil war, with three main factions vying for power and the mineral-rich Shaba province attempting to secede. Order was established only with the help of a large-scale United Nations Operation. In 1965, Mobutu Sese Seko took power in a military coup.

Throughout his rule, Mobutu faced numerous threats to his regime: military rebellions, dissident movements, attempts at secession, mercenary revolts, invasions and violent disputes, and conflict spillover from neighbouring states. Cobalt and copper-rich Shaba province was invaded by mercenaries and exiled dissidents on four occasions.

Following the pattern of weak-state rules, Mobutu employed a number of classic regime security strategies. He employed mercenaries to subdue the country in the first years of his rule, bribed opposition politicians to join the government, suppressed opposition movements, engaged in identity politics, hollowed out state institutions to prevent the rise of

potential opponents, and split the armed forces into several factions to avoid coups and rebellions. Externally, he allied with the United States, providing a conduit for getting arms to Angola's UNITA rebels. In exchange, he received massive amounts of military and economic aid, which he then used to manage internal opposition. French paratroopers and American logistical support helped Mobutu to defeat an invasion of Shaba in 1978.

In 1996, a rebel alliance led by Laurent Kabila and backed by Rwanda emerged in the east of the country in the chaos engendered by the spillover of the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Within a few months, and despite employing a mercenary army, Mobutu's regime collapsed. The Kabila-led alliance soon fell apart, however, and full-scale civil war broke out in 1998. Rwanda and Uganda intervened on the side of different rebel factions, while Angola, Namibia, and Zimbabwe sent troops to support the Kabila government. Africa's 'first world war' raged until peace accords were signed in 2003, leading to elections and the withdrawal of most foreign occupying forces. However, Rwandan troops intervened again in 2009 and the war continues in early 2012 in eastern DRC, despite the presence of a UN peacekeeping force and elections in 2011. The UN estimates that more than five million people have lost their lives in the conflict. Despite a recognized central government, the DRC continues to exist as a semi-collapsed state, with various warlords, ethnic militia, criminal enterprises, and foreign entrepreneurs engaged in large-scale looting, trade monopolization, and the exploitation of minerals.

citizens often face a much more serious threat from their own governments than they do from the governments of other states. Instead of ensuring individual and social security, the continual use of coercion makes the state the primary threat to security. Moreover, the threat is affected on several levels: repression and identity politics threatens their physical survival through the spread of violent conflict; and deliberately undermining state institutions and patronage politics threatens their welfare and livelihood.

Explaining insecurity in weak states

There are different theories about the causes of weak-state or regime insecurity. Taken together, they can tell us a great deal about how conditions of insecurity evolve and persist. State-making theories explore the origins of the weak-state insecurity dilemma in the initial state-construction process. Warlord politics theories explore the impact of neoliberal globalization and the end of the Cold War on the choices facing weak-state elites. The combination of the inherited structural features of statehood and the nature and processes of the international context explain much about why weak states find it so difficult to escape from their insecurity dilemma.

State-making theories

Observing weak-state insecurity, scholars like Ayoob (1995) have suggested that these conditions represent a normal stage in the long-term state-building process

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CASE STUDY 12.2 Anatomy of a weak state: Uzbekistan

The Central Asian country of Uzbekistan gained its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. From 1924 to 1991 Uzbekistan had been governed as an outlying colony in the Soviet Empire. Consequently, at independence it shared many of the weaknesses of other post-colonial and post-Soviet states, such as an externally oriented, dependent economy, weak national institutions, overdeveloped coercive capabilities, a legitimacy crisis, and a history of authoritarianism.

President Islam Karimov, a former Communist Party boss, has ruled Uzbekistan since its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. Throughout this period, the Karimov regime has been under constant threat from dissidents and anti-government campaigners, crime syndicates and drug traders, a small-scale terrorist campaign, opposition Islamic groups, and spillover from the conflicts in Afghanistan and Tadjikistan.

Karimov has clung to power using a variety of regime security strategies, most commonly severe repression against real and potential opponents. Despite nominal constitutional protections, the government has banned public meetings and demonstrations, restricted the independent media, arrested thousands of opposition political and religious supporters, and used horrific torture and murder to suppress dissent. Uzbekistan presently has the worst human rights record in the former Soviet Union. Other internal strategies used by Karimov to maintain power have included the clever manipulation of elections and

referendums, rewriting the constitution to centralize all power in the president, and endemic corruption among government officials.

Externally, Karimov's primary strategy was to ally the regime with the United States in the War on Terror. In 2002, the two countries signed a Declaration of Strategic Partnership. In return for hundreds of millions of dollars of economic and military support, Uzbekistan provided the USA with military bases from which to conduct missions in Afghanistan, coercive interrogation facilities for terrorist suspects in the controversial rendition programme, and diplomatic support for US policies in the United Nations.

However, the US–Uzbek partnership came under severe strain following the military crackdown against anti-government demonstrators in the city of Andijan in May 2005, when hundreds of unarmed civilians were killed and injured. Following US criticism of the appalling human rights situation in Uzbekistan, and the imposition of sanctions by the European Union, Karimov ordered the closure of US military bases in the country. In response to the deterioration in relations with the USA, Karimov turned instead towards building closer relations with Russia, a strategy of some success for a number of years. Since 2008 however, relations with the West have once again improved, and in early 2012, Uzbekistan maintains fragile relationships with Russia, its neighbours, and the West.

from which strong states will, in time, emerge. Taking a historical view, they argue that the European experience proves that state building is a long and traumatic process, taking several centuries to complete and involving a great deal of bloodshed. Typically, it entailed sustained and bloody conflict between a centralizing state and powerful social forces before a monopoly on violence was achieved and disparate groups of people were welded into a single national identity. Significantly, representative institutions emerged only gradually, after a powerful central state and a cohesive sense of national identity had been established.

The argument is that what has been observed in developing countries since the mid-twentieth century is a similar process of state consolidation to that experienced by European states in past centuries, but with additional obstacles that were absent during the European experience. For example, today's weak states have to cope with the ongoing effects of colonial rule, which includes: the imposition of alien doctrines and institutions of statehood; irrational territorial boundaries and the lack of national identity; societies divided along class, religious, and ethnic lines; stunted and dependent economies; and an entrenched culture of political violence.

The contemporary state-building process is also constrained by a shortened time frame. Unlike European states, weak states today are expected to become effective, fully functioning, democratic states within a few decades. Moreover, they are expected to do it without the violence, corruption, and human rights abuses that accompanied the European state-building process. Established international norms and rules, such as the protection of minority and human rights and the right of self-determination (which often encourages ethnic rebellion), also complicates the state-building process. A particularly problematic norm is the inviolability of statehood. Once a state achieves independence and is admitted to the United Nations, its status cannot be revoked or its territory subsumed into another state, no matter how unviable it proves to be in practice. Thus, unlike European entities such as Burgundy and Aragon, which could not complete the state-building process and were absorbed into larger, more viable units, today's weak states must struggle on indefinitely.

In short, according to this approach, we can expect weak states to experience a great deal more bloodshed and violence over an extended period until stronger, more representative states emerge. Until then, they will remain 'quasi-states'—states possessing the nominal features of statehood, such as international recognition, but lacking the infrastructural capacities to create and secure a sense of genuine national identity (Jackson 1990).

KEY POINTS

- Scholars like Ayoob suggest that the conditions of insecurity in weak states are an expression of the historical state-building process.

- The European state-building process was similarly bloody and long.

- Weak states face the state-building process in an environment constrained by the experience of colonialism, a shortened time frame, and problematic international norms.

Warlord politics

During the Cold War, many weak states maintained a semblance of stability and integration through various forms of elite and social accommodation. The primary means of accommodation was the construction of a patrimonial or *redistributive state*—a system of patronage where state resources were distributed to supporters through complex social and political networks. The redistributive state was frequently maintained by direct superpower assistance, loans and development assistance from international financial institutions, and periods of high-commodity prices that supplied its primary national income. Temporary disruptions to the stability of the weak-state redistributive system came from sudden falls in commodity prices, wider economic shocks (such as the oil shocks), and the sudden loss of superpower support (which could be compensated for by switching to the other superpower, as Somalia did in the 1970s). In many cases, these shocks resulted in serious internal violence.

The end of the Cold War signalled a period of profound transformation in the international system. A major consequence of the end of superpower conflict was the decline of military and economic support for many weak states. At the same time, international financial institutions began to demand changes in the economic and political policies of weak states—what are called 'conditionalities'—in exchange for continuing loans and assistance. In keeping with the global

trend of privatization and deregulation, weak states were forced by lenders and investors to sell off and downsize government bureaucracies. These developments severely disrupted the redistributive state and forced rulers to find new ways of accommodating rival strongmen and restless social groups.

Somewhat paradoxically, elite strategies have since involved the deliberate creation of state collapse and social disorder. This entails hollowing out state institutions, fragmenting the armed forces, and creating parallel informal armed groups, thereby spreading the means of violence even further into society. The logic of 'disorder as a political instrument' is that, within the context of a collapsing state, elites can pursue forms of commercial activity that are not possible under normal circumstances, such as trading in illegal commodities, looting, protection rackets, coercive monopolies, and the like. Thus, exploiting the shadow markets engendered by neoliberal globalization, and in alliance with local strongmen and multinational companies, weak-state elites have created a new kind of political economy, what Reno (1998) has called 'warlord politics'. Crucial in this enterprise is the ability to employ private companies to perform state roles, especially the task of providing regime security.

As an alternative political-economic system, warlord politics provides elites with several advantages. It permits commercial activity and accumulation in the grey or shadow regions of the global economy, tapping into resources that would otherwise be unavailable to weak-state elites and that are desperately needed to buy protection from rivals. In this sense, warlord politics facilitates the process of elite accommodation needed to keep regimes safe from violent overthrow. It also inhibits the emergence of mass social movements because civil society finds itself trapped between a rapacious state and well-armed networks of strongmen pursuing their own illiberal agendas.

In short, warlord politics represents an innovative response to rapid global change that permits the survival of the regime under harsh new conditions. From this perspective, state collapse and widespread disorder are not a temporary aberration in the normal functioning of the state, but a new form of regime security forced on weak-state elites by changes in the wider international system.

KEY POINTS

- The end of the Cold War and the adoption of conditionalities by IFIs severely disrupted the redistributive state.

- Weak-state elites responded by developing new and innovative forms of political economy based on shadow and predatory commercial activities called 'warlord politics'.

- Warlord politics works to control internal threats from strongmen and mass movements.

Conclusion: prospects for the weak state

In this chapter we have examined the conditions of insecurity that affect the majority of the world's states. We have suggested that the insecurity dilemma facing developing countries is both profound and unique, and is rooted in the fundamental structures and processes of incomplete statehood. The conditions of insecurity in weak states are the result of three interrelated factors: the historical state-making process; the structures and processes of the present international system; and the security strategies employed by weak-state elites. In the context of profound internal threats and constraining external conditions, national security becomes a matter of maintaining short-term regime security. The pursuit of regime security, however, is itself a profoundly contradictory process; short-term policies of regime security undermine the more important state-building project—and the security of the state and society.

From this perspective, weak-state insecurity appears to be an inescapable condition. There have been very few clear-cut cases where weak states have made a successful transition to state consolidation and genuine national security. The fundamental security challenge facing weak states lies in achieving greater levels of stateness and moving towards improved levels of genuine state strength. The challenge, therefore, lies in the willingness and ability of weak-state elites to substitute short-term regime security strategies for long-term state-building strategies.

Should regimes choose to take the state-building project seriously, the process will undoubtedly be long and difficult, not least because a number of entrenched

internal and external obstacles to effective statehood remain. These include: the continued distorting effects of colonialism; the processes of neoliberal globalization and the imposition of external conditionalities; small arms proliferation; continuing external intervention by powerful actors; the existence of constraining international norms; and debilitating internal conditions such as poverty, social division, weak institutions, and the like. The global war on terror launched in the wake of 9/11 has also had a negative effect on the state-building project, as the fight against terrorism has largely diverted international attention and resources from poverty eradication, democracy promotion, and peace-building activities. Weak-state elites have also been able to brand their internal enemies as terrorists, and, just as during the Cold War, receive military support in exchange for cooperation in the fight against terrorism (see Case Study 12.2). In other words, the new war on terror has allowed weak-state elites to reprioritize regime security over state building and receive vital international support for their efforts.

As during the Cold War, the problems of weak-state insecurity take a low priority on international agendas compared to the interests of the Great Powers. So far, solutions to the weak-state security dilemma have not moved far beyond the establishment of multi-party democracy and free markets. It is sometimes argued that forceful 'regime change' and perhaps even a liberal or benign recolonization, such as occurred in Germany and Japan after the Second World War, is the only effective long-term solution. Others stress the need for humanitarian intervention to protect the security of civilians and promote human rights. They argue that 'cosmopolitan peace-keeping' (Kaldor 1999) and so-called peace-building missions are required to transform violent domestic politics in weak states into long-term peace and stability. In practice, both approaches are based on a similar liberal perspective, which envisages a minimal state devoted to protecting individual and market freedoms. The main problem is that, thus far, despite decades of effort, no case of enforced neoliberalization, through either conditionalities, regime change, or peace building, has succeeded in transforming a weak state into a strong state.

Given the enormous challenges facing weak states, and recognizing the fundamental inequities of the state project itself and the failure thus far to reform illiberal weak states, some radical commentators have suggested that state building should be abandoned in favour of alternative forms of political organization based on either smaller units—city states or ethnic groups, for example—or larger units—such as regional organizations like the European Union. The first option, sub-state political organizations, seems impractical in regions that are awash with weapons, criminal gangs, and poverty; the case of Somalia, which has been without a functioning central government since 1991, is informative in this regard. The second option, regional organization, is similarly not without its limitations. While it has had a modicum of success in the European Union, in regions characterized by weak states, underdevelopment, and instability, such as Africa or Latin America, regional processes are severely constrained in what they can achieve.

In the end, overcoming the internal and external obstacles to state building in the developing world will require tremendous political will and resources, and the elaboration of alternative and innovative approaches to state-building assistance. More importantly, it will require fundamental reform of international economic and political structures, including the international trade in weapons. Given the present preoccupation with international terrorism and the lack of enthusiasm by the world's developed states for debt relief, development, and curbs on the small arms trade, the short-to-medium-term future of the weak state looks as bleak as it ever was, although the international movement for greater democratic participation exemplified in the Arab Spring may offer some hope (for more on the arms trade see Chapter 22).

? QUESTIONS

1. In what ways are orthodox approaches to security limited in their explanation of the weak-state insecurity dilemma?

2. What are the primary differences between weak and strong states?

3. Outline the main internal and external security threats facing weak states.

4. What makes the security dilemma in weak states unique?

5. What are the differences, if any, between national security, state security, and regime security in the weak-state context?

6. What domestic and international strategies do weak-state elites adopt to try to manage their security challenges?

7. What are the main internal and external obstacles to state building for weak states?

8. What impact has the end of the Cold War and the onset of globalization had on the weak-state security predicament?

9. Is abandoning the state-building project in favour of alternative forms of political organization a realistic solution to the weak-state security dilemma?

10. What role should the international community play in the state-consolidation process?

11. How might the global democracy movement seen in the Arab Spring affect the process of state consolidation and the quest for greater security in developing countries?

FURTHER READING

- Ayoob, Mohammed (1995), *The Third World Security Predicament: State Making, Regional Conflict, and the International System*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner. Provides an informative analysis of the weak-state security predicament in its internal, regional, and international dimensions.

- Buzan, Barry (1991), *People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, 2nd edn, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner. A seminal reformulation of security beyond its traditional focus to include the security predicament facing the majority of weak states in the world.

- Holsti, Kalevi J. (1996), *The State, War, and the State of War*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. An empirical analysis of contemporary warfare, which demonstrates that internal war within weak states has been the primary form of international conflict since 1945.

- Job, Brian (1992) (ed.), *The Insecurity Dilemma: National Security of Third World States*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner. A very useful collection of essays from leading experts on some of the key dimensions of security in developing states.

- Kaldor, Mary (1999), *New and Old Wars: Organised Violence in a Global Era*, Cambridge: Polity. A provocative and original statement on the changing nature of warfare and the need for new approaches to peacekeeping in weak states.

- Musah, Abdel-Fatah and Kayode Fayemi, J. (2000) (eds), *Mercenaries: An African Security Dilemma*, London: Pluto. Provides a fascinating collection of essays on the security dilemma associated with the intervention of mercenaries in Africa's weak states.

- Reno, William (1998), *Warlord Politics and African States*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner. Provides a compelling analysis of how weak-state elites have adapted governance strategies to the opportunities and constraints of neoliberal globalization.

- Rich, Paul B. (1999) (ed.), *Warlords in International Relations*, London: Macmillan. An insightful collection of essays by leading experts on the role of warlords, the small arms trade, private military contractors, and other security challenges facing weak states.

- Thomas, Caroline (1987), *In Search of Security: The Third World in International Relations*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner. An original formulation of the weak-state security predicament.

- Zartman, I. William (1995) (ed.), *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner. An important collection of essays on the nature, causes, and consequences of weak-state decay and collapse.

🌐 IMPORTANT WEBSITES

- **http://www.iansa.org**   The International Action Network on Small Arms is a global network of civil society organizations working to stop the proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons. The website contains resources on all aspects of small arms proliferation and international efforts to regulate the trade.

- **http://www.iss.co.za**   The Institute for Security Studies is a leading research institution on all aspects of human security in Africa. The website contains news, analysis, and special reports on all aspects of security in Africa.

- **http://www.systemicpeace.org/inscr/inscr.htm**   The Integrated Network for Societal Conflict Research (INSCR) programme at the Center for International Development and Conflict Management, the University of Maryland, coordinates major empirical research projects on armed conflict, genocide, and politicide, minorities at risk, regime types, and state failure. The website has links to all the major projects and datasets.

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